DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 158 CS 010 573

AUTHOR Cairney, Trevor H.; Munsie, Lynne
TITLE Talking to Literacy Learners: A Parent Education Project.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 35p.; Paper presented at the International Convention on Language and Literacy (Norwich, England, April 6-10, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Involvement; Elementary Education; Family Environment; Foreign Countries; *Literacy; *Parent Student Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Program Descriptions; Program Evaluation; Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS Australia (New South Wales); Family Literacy

ABSTRACT

The project described in this paper, called Talking to Literacy Learners or TTALL, was designed to improve the quality of parent child interaction involving reading and writing, to promote gains in literacy standards, and to engender a more positive attitude toward schooling. Designed for an urban community in New South Wales where adult and youth illiteracy are above national standards, the project differs from most other parent involvement programs in that its focus is on the adult rather than the child. The project was designed to be completed in 5 distinct stages over a period of 18 months. The stages were as follows: (1) training 25 parents to interact more effectively with their children; (2) deploying those parents as tutors in the school and the community; (3) preparing resource kits, leaflets, and aids to promote literacy; (4) providing advanced training for parent-tutors; and (5) training of selected parents from the parent-tutor group to assume coordinating roles for separate community clusters attempting to introduce the program. Although the program has completed only the first stage, it appears to have been highly successful: 24 of the 25 participants completed stage 1, and 18 of the 24 returned for the second stage. (One figure representing the educational cycle used in the program and 6 tables of data are included; 35 references and an outline of the content of the first stage are attached.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED332158

Talking to Literacy Learners: A parent education project

Trevor H. Cairney
Lynne Munsie

University of Western Sydney, Nepean

Address to the
International Convention on Language and Literacy

Norwich, 6th-10th April, 1991.

Mailing Address: Faculty of Education,
University of Western Sydney, Nepean,
P.O. Box 10,
Kingswood, NSW, 2747,
Australia.

CS010573

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Trevor Cairney

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The TTALL Programme: Collaborating with parents to empower literacy learners

Trevor H. Cairney
Lynne Munsie
University of Western Sydney, Nepean

1. Research concerning parents and literacy

a) Parents skill as language teachers

Teachers, educators and researchers have long pointed to the almost miraculous way in which children master the complexities of spoken language before the age of five years. Parents play a dominant role in this development, intuitively prompting and prodding their children towards meaning making. From birth parents treat their babies as if they are intending to communicate with them, and they respond to them in the light of this (Wells, 1986). The child focuses on meaning and the care giver responds to the meanings they make. In the context of this purposeful exchange, meanings develop. Thus language develops as the child actively participates in real communicative acts, and engages in a constructive process of meaning making (Lindfors, 1985).

The parent's role in this is as a listener, prompter, information giver, asker of questions, but all the time a fellow meaning maker interested in the communication process. It seems that the key to early language development is the volume of opportunities to make meaning (Wells, 1983), the degree of one-to-one interaction with adults where the adult is talking about matters that are of interest and concern to the child (Wells, 1986), and finally, the type and nature of adult interaction with children (Snow, 1983).

b) Influence of the home on early literacy development

Consistently, research has found that school factors (e.g. resources, class sizes, classroom organization and methods) account for less than 20% of variance when predicting student achievement (Hanushek, 1981; Jencks et al., 1972 & Thompson, 1985). However, differences in family backgrounds and teachers have a significant impact on student achievement. In fact, some have suggested that the cumulative effect of home background variables alone, probably accounts for over 60% of the variance in student literacy performance (Rutter, Tizzard & Witmore, 1970; Thompson, 1985).

It also appears that the extent to which children cope with schooling is related closely to a range of cultural factors. This has been illustrated by Heath's (1983) well known ethnography in three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas. Heath found considerable cultural variation in the acquisition of oral language and the manner in which parents introduced children to literacy. By focusing closely on story reading she was able to document great differences in community styles of literacy socialisation.

Children in a white middle class community (Maintown), were socialized into a life in which books and information gained from them was seen as having a significant role in learning. They interacted with children from 6 months in book reading events, asking information questions, relating the content to life situations and encouraging them to tell their own narratives. In a white working class community (Roadville), children were also involved in book reading, but this centred on alphabet and number books, real life stories, nursery rhymes and bible stories. The focus for these parents was usually on factual recounts of events. Parents asked factual questions about the books, but did not attempt to relate the books to the children's lives.

Finally, the parents within a poor black community (Trackton) on the other hand, rarely provided book reading events. As well, the questions these parents asked were different. They did not ask their children to name or describe the features of their world. As well, they used oral stories of a different kind, focussing mainly on fictional stories or familiar events in new contexts.

Clearly, each of these communities was inadvertently preparing its children in different ways for schooling. She found that children in Maintown performed well in school. Roadville children on the other hand did well in the early grades, but had difficulty after grade three when a greater emphasis was placed on analytic, predictive and evaluative questioning, which required them to think more abstractly and independently. However, Trackton children were unsuccessful in school right from the early grades.

What was happening in each of these communities was that the place literacy enjoyed in their culture was helping to prepare these children, to greater and lesser extents, to succeed or fail in the school system.

c) <u>The impact of story reading on school achievement</u>

There are many factors which contribute to achievement within school. For example, Purves (1973) found that one of these factors, is the extent to which children are given opportunities to read at home.

There appears to be great power in reading to young children. Children who have been read to by adults in the preschool years show more positive attitudes to reading, increased confidence and motivation to read, and greater reading and writing proficiency (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982; Grimmett & McCoy, 1980; Spiegel). In fact, the interaction of parents, children and books appears to be one of the major factors that help initiate children into the world of literacy (Wells, 1986).

But not only does early story reading with adults influence emergent literacy, it appears that it is a powerful factor that influences literacy achievement at school. In Victoria 100 Schools Project (a five year longitudinal study of educational and psychological factors which impact on students' literacy development) has found that reading activity at home had a significant positive influence on student reading achievement, attitude and attentiveness. These factors in turn accounted for 30% of variance in reading achievement for 5-6 year olds, rising to 50% for 12--14 year olds (Rowe, 1990).

d) Parent participation

Not surprisingly, the recognition of the importance of parents in the education process, has led to a concern to maximize the extent of their involvement in education. But this involvement has taken many forms, and at times has been anything but helpful.

Bruner (1980, in Briggs & Potter, 1990) has pointed out that parent involvement is often a "dustbin term" which can mean all things to all men. Potter also points out that often parent involvement programmes are "shallow, ineffectual, confusing, and frustrating to both parents and teachers" (Briggs & Potter, 1990).

One of the reasons for the failure of some programmes is that many teachers have negative attitudes about parents and parent involvement. These teachers sometimes claim that parents are apathetic, come to school only to criticize etc (Briggs & Potter, 1990). This appears to be particularly evident with parents from lower socio-economic groups.

Others have suggested that the failure of some programmes to attract parental interest, may be due to parents not feeling competent to deal with school work. As well, it has been argued that this phenomenon may reflect the fact that these parents feel insecure in the school setting and fearful about participation in the learning of their children (Moles, 1982; Greenberg, 1989).

As Mavrogenes (1990) points out, teachers and principals may need to question the assumption that low-income parents do not care about their children's education. It is likely that most parents are willing to help with their children's education, but many may have little idea concerning how to go about it.

Halsey and Midwinter (1972, in Briggs & Potter, 1990) argued that the best way to overcome some of these problems and to empower working class students, was to change the nature of education to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to gain power over their own community. This they argued would require the transformation of primary schools into focal points for their communities, thus bringing teachers and parents closer together, and leading subsequently to changed attitudes on the part of both parties. These schools, it was argued, should aim to develop self-esteem and provide students with power over their lives.

Within this context, parent participation can be introduced not simply to allow parents to learn from teachers, but to enable better links to be established between the home, school and community. Some schools have adopted a very narrow definition of parent involvement, which primarily seeks to determine what parents can do for teachers, rather than what schools can do for them. This view is often evidenced by parents filling a variety of unpaid teacher aide or custodial roles.

Parents must be viewed as equal partners. There must be a reciprocal relationship. We need to go beyond involvement and recognize the vital role that parents play in education. As Kruger & Mahon (1990, p. 4) point out, "parental involvement in literacy learning has much greater value than as an add-on to what teachers do".

e) Moving towards new models for participation

Petit (1980) has outlined a model describing levels of parent participation that is of some help in understanding what form parent participation can take.

The first level is monitoring and is essentially teacher initiated and in the form of letters, informal talks, class meeting etc.

The second level is informing, and involves the provision of more detailed information about school policies, organizational procedures, aims, expectations etc. This is usually achieved through notices, direct reporting, parent-teacher conferences, home visits by teachers, well produced written materials.

The third level is that of participation and essentially involves some type of involvement in the activities of the classroom or school. The examples Petit provides are varied but include schools where parents helped to produce materials, and another where the school ran a series of parent inservice workshops on reading.

Unfortunately, Petit's classification system tends to mask a great deal of diversity within the categories he selects. In particular, the 'participation' category appears to be extremely broad. Any classification of parental involvement should ideally address the issues of content, process, and source (or initiator) of the involvement, and who is in control of the learning.

Rasinski and Fredericks (1989) are also critical of Petit's classification and suggest that it does not go far enough. They suggest a fourth category which they label empowerment. At this level both teachers and parents are involved in advising, planning and administering programmes. This level is the level to which we should aspire and which few reach. It requires considerable trust and co-operation. Rasinski and Fredericks also suggest a refinement that allows for the option of a home orientation as well as a school orientation.

One of the problems with classification systems of this type is that by categorizing programmes, a great deal of internal diversity is lost. A much better way to describe programmes that have been attempted, may be to assess each project on a number of key variables, with the assumption being that on each of these there will be a continuum ranging from one extreme to another.

The key variables when looking at parent programmes appear to be content, process, source (who initiated the programme?) and control (who is in charge?). Table 1 is an attempt to describe the range of options that are possible for each of these key variables.

Table 1 about here

In setting up the TTALL programme we were mindful of the need to treat to think carefully about each of the key variables in Table 1. We were mindful that we had initiated this programme so that we would immediately start from a position of power. However, it was our aim to involve parents as true partners and as a result allow them to assume control of their own learning.

When an attempt was made to assess the TTALL project on these four key variables it became evident that the programme had the potential to involve parents as partners, not simply clients or helpers (See Table 2).

Table 2 about here

In setting up our programme we were conscious of the need to help parents interact more effectively with their children. That is, to respond to their written and read texts in such a way that their chances of success at school were maximized.

In doing this we were aware that the home provides this type of environment when helping children to learn to speak. However, when school age is reached and literacy is concerned, there appears to be an immediate change. This change often involves a change in the very nature of their relationship with their child. Shortly after school entry parents change cease to be providers of risk free environments in which children are encouraged to experience many things, explore problems and try out new skills. Instead, many create an environment in which literacy is often practised out of context, without a primary focus on meaning, and in which risk taking is discouraged.

It is an assumption of this project that the home environment most conducive to school learning, is ideally one in which the relationship between adult and child is an accepting, supportive and stimulating one. It was our belief that such an environment should also offer respect for the children's ability to direct his/her own learning (Bissex, 1984).

f) Attempting to involve many parents in the programme

Another major concern for us when designing the TTALL programme was that parent participation programmes typically lead to the involvement of only a few parents (often middle class women). This it would seem may lead to highly involved parents children having higher achieving children.

As Toomey (1989) has pointed out, this in turn, may lead to a different form of educational inequality. However, as Kruger and Mahon (1990) argue, this overlooks the benefits that all children within schools might receive if well organized participation programmes were in place.

It was this last viewpoint which led to the multi-stage model adopted in the TTALL programme. A model which begins with a programme focussed on individual parents working with their own children, then moves slowly towards the deployment of parents as resource people for other children, and indeed other schools.

g) Specific parent programmes for literacy

There have been many attempts to design parent programmes of different types. Some of these have been part of a major research project, others a response to local school level initiatives, and still others, system level attempts to involve more parents.

Some of the most significant initiatives have occurred in England. The Plowden report (1967) was one of a number of factors which probably influenced the significant number of initiatives in this country. It brought with it the concept of partnership between home and school. It also recognized that the most important factors contributing to failure of working class students were differences in language, experiences and values between home and school.

One highly successful attempt to involve parents was the Haringey Reading Project. This confirmed that reading standards can be raised substantially with parent participation in the school. This project involved 6 schools from the same multi-ethnic inner London Borough, where literacy standards were well below national averages. The project involved children aged 6-8 years of age for a period of two years.

The six classes at six separate schools were assigned at random to one of three groups: parent involvement (2 schools), additional teacher help in school (2 schools), and control schools, which received no additional help (2 schools).

It was found that children whose parents were involved in the participation programme made significant gains in reading achievement (irrespective of reading ability), while the others made little (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison: 1982).

The Belfield Primary School Experiment (Wilby, 1982) was another project which provided confirmation of the value of participation programmes. In this study, parents were involved for three years and were visited by teachers who provided lists of 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' about reading. As well, children were provided with books each night which were taken home and read with parents. Parents then sent written comments back to school the next day so that teachers could follow up problems.

Similar results were also achieved with a group of working class 7 year olds in Barking (Essex). After two years children who had not taken reading books home had reading scores below national averages, whereas those who had received parent help were reading above national averages (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison; 1982).

One very practical outcome of this work has been the use of the paired reading technique. This simple technique was first designed by Morgan (1976) and was later refined by Tizard, Schofield & Hewison (1982), Topping & McKnight (1984), and Topping & Wolfendale (1985). It is a simple procedure which involves two phases. The first is a simultaneous phase where a tutor and child sit next to each other reading out loud in synchrony. The tutor adjusts the reading speed to that of the child. Miscues are picked up as the reading proceeds, the child being asked to repeat the correct word before proceeding.

The second independent reading phase, involves a similar pattern of synchronised reading, except the reader attempts independent reading when confident. This is achieved by encouraging the child to gently tap the tutor when he/she feels that it is possible to read independently. The tutor praises the child and he/she proceeds until an error is made. This is then corrected by the tutor reading the original version. The reading then proceeds in a synchronised way until the child again signals to the tutor for independent reading to begin.

The studies that have employed this strategy have been highly successful. Positive results have been found with diverse school communities covering all socio-economic backgrounds. These results have been found in as little as 4 weeks, and as much as a year. The average length of time for the initial use of the strategy is approximately 6 weeks. Gains of 3 times 'normal' (defined as one year in reading age in one chronological year) in reading accuracy and 5 times normal in comprehension are typical (Topping, in Topping & Wolfendale, 1985).

This strategy has also been tested in an Australian project called the School, Home and Reading Enjoyment (SHARE) programme (Turner, 1987). This project has again confirmed that paired reading has a positive impact on participating students and their parents. Benefits of Paired Reading were found to be evident in improved attitude to reading, and gains in reading rate, accuracy and comprehension.

But of course there have been more complex and elaborate programmes developed. One recently developed English package (Pearce, 1990) has become known as the Cambridge Programme. It is essentially an inservice programme for support teachers, teachers and educators interested in parental involvement in reading projects. The programme consists of eight separate booklets for parents and a variety of associated activities and resources.

An initial period of 6 weeks is set aside for the programme, although this is often extended. The work is individualised and varies according to the child's needs. The programme begins with an initial meeting between the support teacher, class teacher, parents and the child. Tasks are then selected for the three participants under the guidance of the support teacher. The class teacher is responsible for the daily programme in school and for selecting the most appropriate words, books, spellings, written work etc (Pearce, 1990). This programme although not yet evaluated fully has proven popular with the participants.

In Australia we have also seen programmes developed by Max Kemp (1989) at the University of Canberra. Kemp's programme involves a series of workshops with parents, designed to help them tutor their own children. Both parents/care givers are required to attend the initial sessions (at night), and later tutors assist them to implement strategies outlined in the programme. The focus in this programme is very much upon helping parents to help their own children. The programme covers topics like learning, the reading process and specific reading strategies. The second phase involves detailed diagnosis conducted by Kemp's staff/students, and the design of a short term programme seen as well suited to the child's needs.

h) Why has the TTALL programme been developed?

The TTALL programme has been developed within this rich context of previous studies. All of these projects have added to our knowledge of parent education. The TTALL programme aims to build on the understandings acquired through many of these projects and programmes, but it also attempts to go further.

One key difference with the programme that will be described is that it has a focus on the adult rather than the child. Most (if not all) of the programmes that we have examined, have placed the focus upon the child. That is, they may have been programmes for parents, but they were initiated because of the needs of specific children with literacy problems, and invariably revolve around these children's needs. In fact, many of these programmes involve the development of individual child programmes and support of

parents as they implement these programmes (e.g. Kemp, 1989; Pearce, 1990). While we are supportive of such approaches, our programme was designed to be a more broadly based community project that hopefully has the potential to influence a larger number of people.

It has been our aim to treat parents as learners, and to see them grow as parents, because it is our belief that to do otherwise is short sighted. If children are to be given a chance to succeed with literacy (and schooling) then parents have to be helped to become long term supporters of their children's learning. Continued growth in children as learners is at least partly dependent upon the quality of interactions that these children experience with their parents within the home.

An additional feature of the TTALL programme is that it has a dual concern with reading and writing. Most projects have focussed on reading. Those that have addressed writing have usually done so in a very limited way.

Finally, the project has been shaped (at least in part) by the group for which it was designed, parents in Western Sydney.

2. Background to the Project

The community of Lethbridge Park is a community with many members who find it exceedingly difficult to cope with the pressures and problems existing in the urban environment. Not surprisingly, the community has high levels of unemployment, vandalism, prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse etc.

As well, adult and youth illiteracy are above national averages. Given the relationship between literacy standards and access to employment and education, ongoing efforts to raise literacy standards, and the value placed upon it by the community, are of great importance.

It was for these reasons that Lethbridge Park was chosen as the site for this project. Funding for the project was provided by the NSW Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs as part of a competitive grants scheme set up for the International Literacy Year.

3. Rationale

The purpose of this project was to design and evaluate an educational programme which it was hoped could improve the quality of parent child interactions when discussion reading and writing. Further, it was hoped that this would lead to gains in literacy standards, and a more positive attitude to schooling.

A secondary aim of the programme was to help equip parents to provide additional literacy opportunities in the home. It has been argued by a number of researchers that the progress of children experiencing literacy problems, depends upon the provision of significantly more reading and writing. Ironically, a number of researchers have shown that students of lower literacy competence consistently read for less time each day (Allington, 1983), read material frequently at their frustration level (Gambrell, Wilson & Gant, 1981) and experience qualitatively inferior interactions with adults concerning their reading and writing (Cairney, 1989a).

The whole project in essence was dependent on a number of important tested, and in some cases, untested assumptions:

(i) Literacy standards in areas like Lethbridge Park would be accelerated rapidly if parents placed a higher priority upon a range of experiences with reading and writing in the preschool years.

(ii) Students within the school system who are currently experiencing difficulties could be assisted if the quality of literacy interactions between parents and children were to be improved.

(iii) People who experience literacy problems require increased opportunities to read and write. Opportunities which cannot simply be provided in school time.

(iv) Literacy standards have a direct impact upon employment prospects, life chances and individual self esteem.

Influenced by the above assumptions, the TTALL project was implemented in an effort to increase community awareness of literacy, and develop parent training packages which could have widespread use within the community.

4. Objectives of the project

The major objective of the project was to design and implement specific educational programmes to:

* Raise parental participation in the literacy activities of their children;
* Improve the quality of the interactions adults have with children as they read and write;
* Train community resource people who could be deployed in a wide range of community literacy activities;
* Raise community expectations concerning literacy;
* Raise community expectations for education;

* Serve as a catalyst for a variety of community-based literacy initiatives.

5. What was the format for the project?

The project was designed to be completed in five distinct stages over a period of eighteen months. The five stages were as follows:

Stage 1 - Involved identifying and training 25 parents to: interact more effectively with their own children (aged 1-12 years) as they engaged in literacy; use a range of strategies to promote literacy development; make greater use of literacy resources within the community. The initial programme requires four hours of attendance (two separate two hour blocks), and between class work with their children, for a period of eight weeks.

All parents completing the programme received a Community Literacy Training Certificate.

Stage 2 - Involves the development of a strategy for deploying parents trained in stage 1 as tutors, to work with other children and adults within the school and community.

Stage 3 - Involves the preparation of a variety of resource kits, leaflets and aids to promote literacy awareness, which offer practical suggestions to parents concerning the literacy development of their children. Some of these are designed specifically to support parents in stage 4 below.

Stage 4 - Involves the training of 15 of the initial group of parents to acquire more advanced skills as literacy tutors. Parents who complete this second stage will be used to introduce other parents and their children to some of the principles and strategies that formed the basis for the stage one programme. This will involve parent tutors following a carefully designed programme that is introduced in six one hour sessions within the family's home.

Stage 5 - Involves training of selected the parents from stage 4 to assume co-ordinating roles for separate community clusters attempting to introduce the TTALL programme.

The training programmes at all stages within this programme were conducted by a full-time programme co-ordinator (Lynne Munsie) and selected university, school, preschool and community resource people. The programmes contained a mixture of short lectures, workshops, demonstration, and apprentice teaching sessions. A critical part of the training was the use of demonstrations of all strategies. This work was conducted in a cycle (see Figure 1) which was recursive in nature, being characterised by movement back and forth within the various stages as specific needs arose.

Figure 1 about here

At this stage of the project the Stage 1 programme has been developed and used with a group of twenty five parents. The content (see Appendix 1) in stage 1 covered basic child development, issues concerning the nature of reading and writing, strategies for assisting children with reading and writing (e.g. directed reading and thinking, conducting writing conferences etc) and familiarity with a basic "Text Talk Cycle" (see Cairney, 1989). The latter is a method developed for interacting with children as they read and write, and requires a scaffolding strategy for helping children to make meaning.

6. Conduct of the Stage 1 Programme

The first group of parents involved in the TTALL programme were invited to consider involvement in the project in a series of written notices sent to all parents associated with Lethbridge Park Primary and Preschools. This was accompanied by extensive media publicity. After several weeks of advertising a public meeting was organized at Lethbridge Park Primary School. At this meeting the purpose of the programme was explained and a simple information sheet distributed requesting an indication of interest. From an initial 50 in attendance at the meeting 26 accepted our invitation to be involved for 4 hours per week.

These parents selected 9.00 to 11.00am as the preferred time for the programme, day-time being preferred because many parents are unemployed and most prefer the safety of their homes at night. All of the parents who chose to complete the programme were unemployed except for one father who was a taxi driver working at night. Twenty five women and one man enrolled for the programme. Most of these parents had experienced only basic high school education (see Table 3).

Table 3 about here

---

7. Evaluation of the TTALL Programme

The evaluation of the project has just begun, and as a result is only partially complete. However, a number of interesting findings have already emerged which are worthy of further discussion. The data we have collected have consisted of the following:

(i) Pre and post-test information for all students whose parents are involved in the project (comprehension, vocabulary). This is still to be analyzed.

(ii) Interviews with all parents before and after the programme. These have varied in format but have included: small group structured interviews, large group unstructured interviews, and individual interviews.

(iii) Videotaping of parents at various stages throughout the project.

(iv) Field note data (recorded by programme co-ordinator and Assistant Principal).

(v) Reflective journal material kept by co-ordinator.

(vi) Group interviews with students and school staff.

At this stage much analysis of these data still needs to be done. However a number of clear trends have emerged, which we will describe briefly:

(a) The programme has had an impact upon the way parents interact with their children

Analyses of parent interviews, and the post-programme survey, suggest that the programme has led to changes in the way parents talk to and with their children. For example, when asked if the course had changed the way they talk to their children about school work 19 parents (79%) felt strongly that it had. The remaining 5 parents (21%) felt less strongly about this, but agreed that it had affected them.

Preliminary analysis of video footage and direct observation of parent/child interactions also suggests that parents are:

a) offering more positive feedback;
b) providing a different focus when listening to children reading (e.g. less emphasis on phonics);
c) are asking better questions;
d) and, are providing qualitatively better responses to their children's writing and reading.

(b) The programme has offered parents strategies they did not have before

It is also apparent that the programme has provided parents with new strategies for talking to their children about reading and writing. Post-programme surveys show that parents now use a variety of new strategies (see Table 4).

Table 4 about here

The most popular strategies are the use of personal spelling dictionaries (71%), predictable books (67%), Dialogue journals (59%), Paired reading (54%), and help with the editing of their child's work (50%). As well, a majority of parents (92%) indicated that they now listened regularly to their child reading.

It has also become obvious from the comments of parents, that the programme is having an effect upon the way they assist their children. As the following entry from the programme co-ordinator's journal shows, the programme strategies are being used at home.

> Wendy was very proud (today). Her eldest son who doesn't live at home was visiting for the weekend. Wendy related an exchange between them as he tried to do some school work:
>
> "He doesn't like writing and wouldn't write anything." "I told him about my course and Rodney's story [i.e. a research writing exercise done as part of TTALL]. He sat down and wrote this [Wendy showed a piece of writing]. It's not very neat - bit hard to understand."
>
> Wendy had written down the spelling errors ready for his own personal dictionary!

While simple strategies like the personal dictionary probably require little skill to implement, some of the strategies that were introduced in the programme are quite sophisticated. For example, the following journal entry from the course co-ordinator's journal shows how the research writing strategy was being applied by one mother (Tracey).

> Before class today Tracey shared how she has been using the research strategy at home. She explained that her son in year 10 was required to complete a major project as part of his School Certificate requirements. He was completing a project on Ice Hockey. He had announced on Sunday that it was due on the following Tuesday. Tracey then related how she used the strategy.
>
> "We went through the steps just like you said, you know discovery draft, then we group the information and everything. I showed him how to use the table of contents and the index. He thought it was great, really easy. We grouped the information under the headings. It worked well. I didn't have to do all the work. I thought this session [i.e. the research session in TTALL] was the best."

The use of the programme strategies at home has also been verified through the interviews with the children of the parents in the programme. For example, Brendon offered the following comment during a structured group interview.

> "The programme is good fun, because she [Daphne his mother] still had a smile on her face and she told us all about it and she bringing stuff home what you sent us to do, and she just make us kids do it with her, so it be good fun and when she finished it she take it up to you."

(c) <u>The programme has helped parents to choose resource material, help children with book selection, and use libraries more effectively</u>

This outcome has been obvious to anyone observing the programme sessions. Parents in the TTALL programme are now more aware of the diversity of resources available in the school and community. They are more capable of finding appropriate resources within the community library, and can now use a range of research skills that previously were not available to them.

Another more subtle (but equally significant) change has been their increased skill at selecting and making available a variety of literature for their children.

One dramatic piece of evidence was observed at our final videotaping session. During the first video session on the initial day of the programme approximately 50% of the parents had chosen basal reading material for the child to read (many of which were appalling). However, at a video session at the end of the programme a variety of quality literature was chosen. In fact, not one parent chose a

school reading book. Another interesting outcome was that whereas initially the parents largely chose the books to be read, by the end of the programme the students themselves had largely made the choice of material. Not surprisingly, it was also obvious that the material chosen was better suited to each child's reading level, with most able to read confidently.

Further evidence that parents are now more aware of the need to make wise choices when selecting resources, is indicated by the number of parents who have frequently sought advice on book selection. Some have made frequent use of the library, others bring books along to sessions to share, and so on.

(d) <u>The parents have gained new knowledge</u>

When the post-programme evaluation was completed by parents it became clear that they firmly believe they have gained new knowledge (See Table 5).

Table 5 about here

One of the interesting findings from this evaluation is that not only do parents feel they have gained new knowledge about learning (100%), writing (96%), reading (100%), and spelling (100%), all now feel more capable of dealing with their children's problems.

The parents self reporting of this perceived growth in knowledge, is also supported by observations of them when working with their own children, as well as by their enthusiastic involvement in the programme sessions. The following segment from the transcript of a group session shows how one parent (Lynne) has been reflecting on her own child's progress. She offered the following response when the group was asked by the programme co-ordinator whether the course had given them new confidence.

> "I was saying to Sue today earlier that I've noticed with Stephen he is best left by himself, he will get on and write, I mean he wrote all of this [Lynne produced some draft writing] by himself, umm while I was getting tea. Now the only word I had to help him with was 'hatched', he asked for that, but the rest he just sat down and wrote. But while we've been here this morning, I had to write the first sentence (he asked me) so he could think of the story, and he just fiddled and looked around the room, watched the other kids. I, I do find that he likes to be left on his own to just get on and do it."

(e) Their families have been affected

One of the interesting outcomes of the TTALL programme has been that it is not only the parents and their children who have been affected. There appears also to have been an effect on families generally. This has been most evident in the way they spend their time.

One of the most telling pieces of evidence came from the parents' self reports at the end of the programme. This indicated that 79% of them now organized their homes in different ways to enable them to help their children with their learning.

Evidence of the impact of families has also been readily apparent in the informal comments of parents as well as in structured interviews.

For example, during an interview one mother (Narelle) described how the programme had helped her to work with her elder daughter, which in turn had influenced their relationship.

> I have found this activity [research skills] really great. Its brought my daughter and I closer together. The other smart one [meaning her son] just thought he was so clever, but my daughter and I have been working really hard. She really enjoys doing the project this way.

Another interesting outcome of the programme is that it has often led to changes in the reading and writing habits of specific children within families. For example, Deborah shared informally one morning how her son had begun to read more books. The co-ordinator's journal entry records the following incident.

> Deborah came in very excited this morning. Her son Grant came out last night and asked her to listen to him read 3 books. As Deborah indicated this was a significant event:
>
> "The first time in seven and a half years!"

A week later, the same parent shared how the use of one of the programme strategies at home (research skills) had had an impact upon the whole family. Once again, the details of her informal comments have been recorded in the co-ordinator's journal.

> Deborah brought in her project today [which was done as part of the programme], beautifully illustrated... Deborah had done the writing, Dad had drawn the picture, and the boys had done the colouring, the paper crumpling, and had also collected some of the information. She commented: "We all got down on the floor and worked on the project, *it was great fun!*"

(f) <u>These parents have already begun to share their insights outside the family</u>

One quite unexpected outcome of the project has been that it has had an impact on outside family members (sisters, etc), neighbours, friends from other schools, etc. For example, the following journal entry details one of many comments made during the programme, which show that the programme is having an impact beyond the parents involved.

> My sister's friends kids can't read. My sister was telling them about the course I was doing. Anyway, they've asked me to help them out. I'm going to show this friend what to do. I'm really excited about it. I feel as if I can really do it now. I showed this friend all the books. She wants to do the course too, but I explained it was just for parents at this school. Anyway, we are making a bit of time for me to go over.

(g) <u>Parents have gained a greater understanding of schools</u>

One of the unexpected benefits of the programme has been an increased understanding of the ways schools operate. When asked in the post-programme evaluation if the TTALL programme had helped them to understand how schools worked, a majority (88%) responded positively.

This common response has been confirmed by observations of the parents working in classrooms, the programme co-ordinator, classroom teachers and the school principal.

(h) <u>Parents have grown in confidence and self esteem</u>

One of the interesting secondary benefits of the TTALL programme has been that the participants have grown in confidence and self esteem. The earlier reported observation that parents have shared knowledge of the programme with people outside the school is evidence of this growing confidence.

This increased confidence and self esteem has also shown itself in other ways. For example, some parents have experienced new found confidence in themselves as learners and literacy users. The following journal entry shows how this has occurred for one parent. Before one of the sessions Barbara shared how she had enjoyed the visit to the community library (part of the programme). She then offered the following comments concerning her own literacy.

> I went to TAFE [Technical College] to improve my literacy but all they did was make you work on bits of paper. I still read word by word you know. My husband said I should read Wilbur Smith but they're too long and I forget what it's all about. I found Wilbur Smith on tape at the library so I have been reading the book along with the tape, it's really great. I'm enjoying reading his stories.

Parent responses to the post-programme evaluation (See table 6) also indicate that they feel more confident. Most feel more confident working with their own children (96%), and when working as a parent in the school (92%).

Table 6 about here

Another interesting finding is that most of the parents (92%) in the programme now wish to pursue further education. Some of these parents have expressed a desire to complete their Higher School Certificate examinations, others want to enter the University of Western Sydney's community access programme (Newstart), and others are contemplating teaching degrees as mature-age students. In fact one parent is now enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree.

8. Conclusion

While a great deal of data analysis is still to be completed, and the TTALL programme is only just entering its second stage, it appears that it has been highly successful. Certainly the participants believe that it has been useful. This is reflected in the high retention rates in the course, (only one of the original 25 students failed to complete it), the self reporting of parents and their children, and observations made during stage 1 of the project.

It is clear that TTALL has had an impact on the lives of the parents and children associated with the programme. What remains to be determined is how great an impact this has had on the literacy competence of the children whose parents have been involved, and whether the programme can have an impact beyond the parent group targeted for the first stage of the programme. The latter will depend on the success of the third and fourth stages of the project that are currently in preparation.

A total of 18 of the original 25 parents have returned for the second phase of the project which involves an additional five two hour workshops, and considerable in-school involvement. These parents will be the major resource people for the third and fourth stages which are designed to equip these parents to introduce other parents and children to the strategies they have learned.

One of our major aims in the TTALL programme has been to equip parents to work more effectively with their children. It is encouraging at the halfway mark of this project to see that individual families have benefited from the programme. We will allow Deborah, one of our parents, to have the final word:

> It's [TTALL] given me a lot more confidence, you know, he's enjoying it, it's a thousand times better than it was when it started, and I've relaxed, so it's easier. And he's writing, and he didn't before, and it's just, I couldn't be happier

References

Allington, R. (1983) The reading instruction provided readers of differing reading abilities. Elementary School Journal, Vol. 83.

Bettelheim, B., & Zelan, K. (1982). On learning to read: The child's fascination with meaning. New York: Knopf.

Bissex, G.L. (1984) The child as teacher. In H. Goelman, A. Oberg & F. Smith (Eds). Awakening to Literacy. Portsmouth (NH): Heinemann.

Briggs, F. & Potter, G. (1990). Teaching children in the first three years of school. Longman Cheshire: Melbourne.

Cairney, T.H. (1989a) Building communities of readers and writers. The Reading Teacher. Vol. 42. No. 8. pp 560-567.

Cairney, T.H. (1989b) Text talk: Helping students to learn about language. English in Australia. 92.

Gambrell, L., Wilson, R. & Gantt, W.N. (1981) An analysis of task attending behaviours of good and poor readers. In R.M. Wilson (Ed.) Diagnostic and Remedial Reading. Columbus (Ohio): Charles E. Merrill.

Greenburg, P. (1989) Parents as partners in young children's development and education: A new American fad? Why does it matter? Young Children. 44. 4. pp 61-74.

Grimmett, S. & McCoy, M. (1980). Effects of parental communication on reading performance of third grade children. The Reading Teacher. 33. pp 303-308.

Hanusheck, E.A. (1981). Throwing money at schools. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management. 1. pp 19-41.

Heath, S.B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life and work in community and classrooms. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Jencks, C., Smith, M., Acland, H., Bane, M.J., Cohen, D., Gentis, H., Heynes, B., & Michelson, S. (1972). Inequality: A reassessment of the effect of family and schooling in America. New York: Basic Books.

Kemp, M. (1989) Parents as Tutors: A case study of a special education programme in oral reading. unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Queensland.

Kruger, T. & Mahon, L. (1990) Reading together: Magical or mystifying. Paper presented to Australian Reading Association Conference, Canberra, 7-10 July.

Lindfors, J.W. (1985). Oral language learning: Understanding the development of language structure. In A. Jagger & M.T. Smith-Burke (Eds). Observing the language learner. Urbana (Ill): IRA.

Mavrogenes, N.A. Helping parents help their children become literate. Young Children, 45, 4, pp 4-9.

Moles, O.C. (1982) Synthesis of recent research on parent participation in children's education. Educational Leadership, 40, pp 44-47.

Morgan, R.T.T. (1976) "Paired Reading" Tuition: A preliminary Report on a Technique for Cases of Reading Deficit. Child Care, Health and Development, Vol. 2, pp 13-28.

Pearce, L. (1990). Partners in literacy: The Cambridge literacy project. Social Context of Literacy. Proceedings of the 15th Australian Reading Association Conference. Canberra, 7-10 July, 1990. 21-28.

Petit, D. (1980) Opening up Schools. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Purves, A.C. (1973). Literature education in ten countries: An empirical study. New York: Wiley.

Rasinski, T.V. & Fredericks, A.D. (1989). Dimensions of parent involvement. The Reading Teacher, Nov, pp 180-182.

Rowe, K.J. (1990). The influence of reading activity at home on students' attitudes towards reading, classroom attentiveness and reading achievement: An application of structural equation modelling with implications for policy implementation. Paper presented at the Australian Reading Association Annual Conference, Canberra, 7-10 July(?), 1989.

Rutter, M., Tizzard, J. & Whitmore, K. (1970). Education Health and Behaviour. London: Longmans.

Snow, C. (1983) Literacy and language: Relationships during the preschool years. Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp 165-189.

Spiegel, D.L. (1981). Reading for Pleasure: Guidelines. Newark (DL): IRA.

Thompson, W.W. (1985). Environmental effects on educational performance. The Alberta Journal of Educational Psychology. 31, pp 11-25.

Tizard, J., Schofield, W., & Hewison, J. (1982). Collaboration between teachers and parents in assisting children's reading. British Journal of Educational Psychology. 52, pp 1-15.

Toomey, D. (1989). How Home-school relations can increase educational inequality: A three year follow-up. Australian Journal of Education. 33, 3, pp 284-298.

Topping, K., & McKnight, G. (1984). Paired reading - and parent power. Special Education - Forward Trends. 11, pp 12-15.

Topping, K. & Wolfendale, S. (Eds) (1985). Parental Involvement in Children's Reading. Beckenham (UK): Croom Helm.

Turner, R. (1987). SHARE Project - Doveton Cluster: A case study. Melbourne: Ministry of Education.

Wilby, (1982) From Briggs & Potter

Wells, G. (1983) language and learning in the early years. Early Child Development and Care. Vol. 11, pp 69-77.

Wells, G. (1986) The meaning makers. Portsmouth (NH): Heinemann.

Figure 1: The Educational Cycle Used in the TTALL Programme

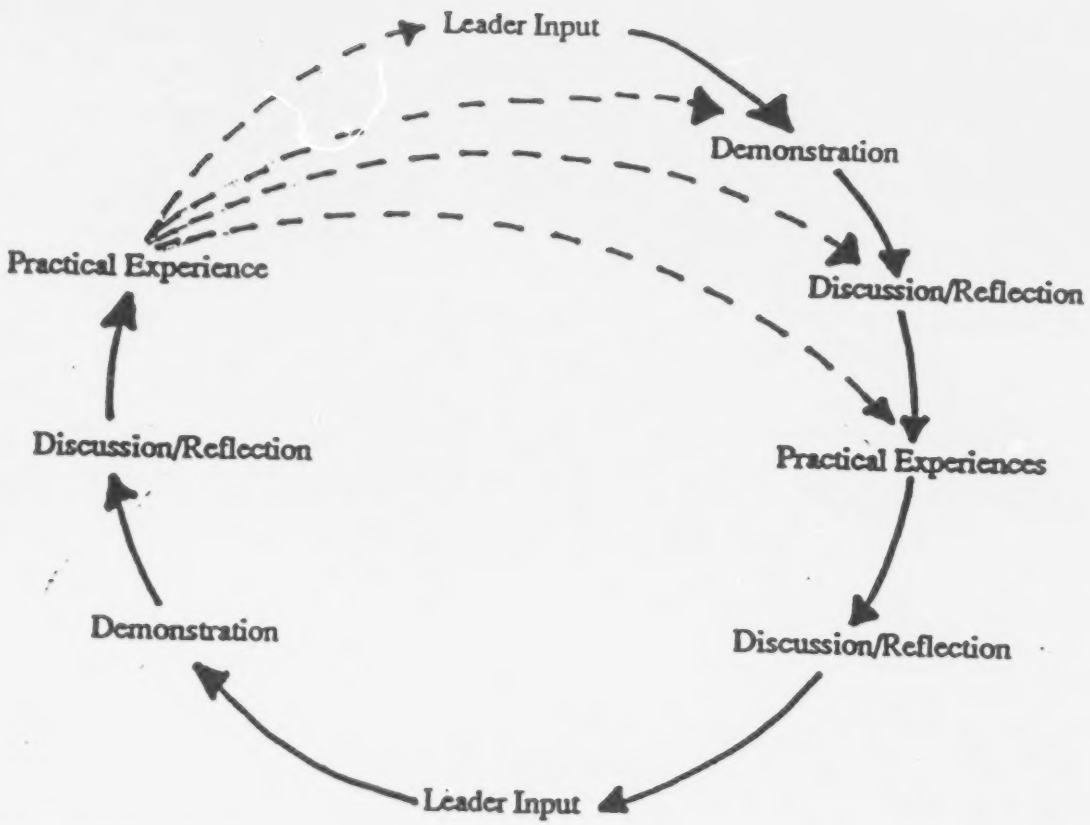

Table 1: A description of key variables that characterize parent involvement programmes. For each variable a continuum exists which attemots to describe the variation that might occur for each variable.

CONTENT

Advice about school policies etc ---> Advice concerning classroom programmes, aims etc ---> Advice on child's strengths, needs etc ---> Workshops/evenings about learning, specific school subjects etc ---> Education programme designed to lead to specific changes in the parent and their children

PROCESS

Information transmission by letter or notice---> Information transmission through direct contact, e.g. parent/teacher evenings ---> Workshop activities that deal with knowledge in a variety of ways ---> Programmes designed to promote learning by involvement, observation and practice

SOURCE

School initiative unsolicited ---> School initiative following comments by parents, expressions of concern etc ---> Parent initiative e.g. course in response to parent request for help

CONTROL

School in control, tranmission to distant faceless clients, e.g. school poliy booklets etc ---> School in control, transmission to known clients at school providing some opportunity for parent comment and feedback ---> School in control but activities largely interactive ---> Neither party in control, mutually agreed agenda and shared responsibility (parents as partners)

Table 2: An assessment of the TTALL project in terms of the key variables seen as critical in parental involvement programmes

CONTENT	Education programme designed to lead to specific changes in the parent and their children * Focus on parent/child interactions * Centrality of meaning, purpose and function * Development of parents as resource people * Parent initiated change * Concern for the parents as people and learners
PROCESS	Learning by involvement, observation and practice * Intensive workshops (32 hours over 8 weeks) * Observation in classrooms * Demonstrations * In-home tasks with own children * In-school tasks with own children
SOURCE	School initiative following comments by parents, expressions of concern (initiative initially from university and school but shape and interests reflective of parents' concerns, needs etc (initial meetings, surveys, parents on planning committee and project team etc)
CONTROL	'Parents as partners' but tending towards 'Parents as initiators in control of their own learning'. Initially it was a partnership, but as the project has proceeded parents have increasingly initiated content, process changes etc because of their perceived needs.

Table 3: Level of education experienced by parents involved in stage 1 of the TTALL programme

Year in which parent left school:
Year 7 (0)
Year 8 (4)
Year 9 (7)
Year 10 (7)
Year 11 (2)
Year 12 (3)
Parents who had experienced Post-secondary education:
Technical College (4)
Teachers' College (1)
Pre-med (Indonesia) (1)

Table 4: Parent responses on the post-programme survey concerning the strategies used with their children. Percentages are indicated in brackets.

I found the following strategies useful to my child's needs	
* Predictable books	SA 11 (46), A 11 (46), N 2 (8)
* Paired Reading	SA 10 (42), A 11 (46), N 3 (12)
* DRTA	SA 6 (25), A 15 (63), N 2 (8) D 1 (4)
* Listening to child reading	SA 19 (79), A 5 (21)
I now use these reading strategies	
* Predictable books	Reg 16 (67), Occas. 8 (23), Never 0 (0)
* Paired Reading	Reg 13 (54), Occas. 11 (46), Never 0 (0)
* DRTA	Reg 10 (42), Occas. 10 (42), Never 4(16)
* Listening to child reading	Reg 22 (92), Occas. 2 (8)
I now use these writing strategies	
* Dialogue journal	Reg 14 (59), Occas. 9 (37), Never 1 (4)
* Conference writing	Reg 10 (42), Occas. 13(54), Never 1 (4)
* Edit my child's writing	Reg 12 (50), Occas. 11(46), Never 1 (4)
* Personal spelling dictionary	Reg 17 (71), Occas. 6(25), Never 1 (4)

Table 5: Parent views on the knowledge they have gained as part of the TTALL programme. Percentages are provided in brackets.

I have gained new knowledge concerning:

The way children:	learn	SA 18 (75), A 6 (25)
	write	SA 18 (75), A 5 (21), N 1 (4)
	read	SA 17 (71), A 7 (29)
	spell	SA 17 (71), A 7 (29)

I am more capable of dealing with problems my children might have

SA 14 (58) A 10 (42)

My ideas have changed concerning:

learning	SA 10 (42)	A 8 (33)	N 4 (17)	D 1 (4)	SD 1 (4)
writing	SA 15 (63)	A 8 (33)			SD 1 (4)
reading	SA 17 (71)	A 6 (25)			SD 1 (4)
spelling	SA 14 (59)	A 8 (33)	N 1 (4)		SD 1 (4)

Table 6: Responses to the post-programme evaluation concerning gained confidence and self esteem. Percentages are indicated in brackets.

I have gained confidence:

* working with children SA 18 (75), A 5 (21), N 1 (4)

* as a parent working in the school SA 14 (58), A 8 (34), N 2 (8)

The course has made me keen to do further study

SA 15 (63) A 7 (29) N 2 (8)

Appendix 1: An outline of the content of the Stage 1 Education programme

The program will run for eight weeks. There will be two sessions per week of two hours duration.

The topics are as follows:

Topic 1. LEARNING

This topic aims to:

- Provide an overview of the course
- Provide an opportunity for participants to discuss their expectations of the course
- Explore the basic conditions in which children learn
- Explore the factors influencing the development of a child's ability to talk, listen, read and write
- Highlight the importance of a child's self esteem and its effect on learning
- Provide an opportunity to share a number of pieces of literature

This topic was represented in 2 two hour sessions.

Topic 2. THE READING PROCESS

This topic aims to:

- Give participants an understanding of the process of reading.
- To explore the instructional approaches of reading which help students construct meaning as they read.
- Examine the ways in which the reader uses three major sources of information:- semantic, syntactic and grapho-phonic, simultaneously and interdependently to construct meaning from print.
- To introduce the participants to the strategies for listening to and observing children as they read.

This topic was represented in 2 two hour sessions.

Topic 3. SUPPORTING READERS

This topic aims to:

- Draw together understanding about early literacy learning and the reading process.
- Introduce a variety of reading experiences - immersion in environmental print, reading to children, reading predictable texts, neurological impress method and Directed Reading Thinking strategy in order to support children's reading development.
- Examine the ways in which books support children's reading development.

This topic was represented in 2 two hour sessions.

Topic 4. USING THE LIBRARY

Included in this topic supporting the Reader is a two hour session which gives participants an opportunity to visit either the school library and/or an organised visit to the community library.

This session aims to:

- give participants an understanding of the library and its functions
- provide participants with the opportunity to join the library
- encourage participants to experience the delights of reading children's literature for themselves
- provide the opportunity to consider suitable books to support the child's reading development.

Topic 5. THE WRITING PROCESS

This topic aims to:

- explore children's writing development
- study some common early writing behaviours
- introduce the handwriting style Foundation Approach

This topic was represented in 2 two hour sessions.

Topic 6. SUPPORTING WRITERS

This topic aims to:

- explore the participants role in supporting children's writing develop
- introduce the experiences which can encourage children's writing
- provide information concerning the development of children's writing by observing children's writing behaviour and analysing their written pieces

This topic was represented in 2 two hour sessions.

Topic 7. SPELLING

This topic aims to:

- explain the relationship between writing, reading and spelling
- encourage participants to see spelling as a tool for writing
- explore the participants role in helping children become spellers by:

  - encouraging writing and risk-taking
  - sharpening children's awareness of words as they read
  - developing proof reading techniques

This topic was represented in 1 two hour session.

Topic 8. RESEARCH WRITING

This topic aims to:

- introduce the experiences which can assist children to research a topic. These will include:

  - selection of a topic
  - preparing a discovery draft
  - categorising information
  - notetaking
  - report writing

- consider suitable resources in the library and at home which will support the topic to be researched
- provide an opportunity for participants and their children to prepare a research topic
- give participants an understanding of skills needed to locate information.

This topic was represented in 4 two hour sessions.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE